

Sisters Celebrate Christmas

By: Sr. Sophia Marie De Guzman, OSB



On December 17, 2023, the whole Manila Priory celebrated its annual Christmas Get-Together with the theme "All Roads Lead Merrily to Bethlehem." As hosts for the program, Sr. Amanda Marie Fondevilla, OSB and Sr. Sophia Marie De Guzman, OSB, opened the celebration with an energetic exchange of welcome greetings in 10 different languages. Then, Sub-prioress Sr. Rosalina Fajardo, OSB delivered her opening remarks. The program proceeded with the video presentations of the Sisters from the Visayas and Mindanao stations. Then, we heard the Christmas greetings of Sr. Scholastica Wang, OSB, from China, Sr. Mary Grace Macatuno, OSB, from Seoul Priory, Sr. Leticia Saraza, OSB, with Sr. Ruth Bartonico, OSB, from Peramiho Priory, Sr. Lumen Gloria Dungca, OSB, with Sr. Maria Caritas Flor, OSB, from Rome, and Sr. Stephanie Zamoras, OSB, from Windhoek Priory.

After a 10-minute health break, the program resumed with the live presentations of the different communities from Luzon which included storytelling, song, dance, poetry, historical narrative, and drama. It was indeed a day filled with fun and excitement. Finally, M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB read her common letter which included the list of new superiors and transfer of assignments of sisters next year. The event ended with a festive lunch which everybody truly enjoyed. It was a joy to meet our Sisters in person and the rest virtually.

Association of Benedictine Schools Coordinating Council (ABS CO CO) Meet
By: Sr. Mary Frances Dizon, OSB

Nine (9) school directresses of the Association of the Benedictine Schools (ABS Co-CO) gathered at St. John's Board Room of St. Scholastica's College, Manila on October 5-6, 2023 for a meeting.

Mother Mary Thomas Prado, OSB in her welcome remarks emphasized the fact that the Benedictine Sisters came to the Philippines with the mission to educate.



Strategic Planning is the core of the meeting, given the present situations in our different schools. It was a two-day exchange of reflections and insights. The facilitator, Dr. Virginia Fornias, the Vice President for Academic Affairs of St. Scholastica's College, Manila used the “**Appreciative Inquiry**” framework in guiding the group in the formulation of the ABS direction for the next two years. Finally, it was set: ***Direction: A financially viable and technologically equipped School of choice that remains committed to holistic Christian and Benedictine Formation and Transformative Education.***

The group also used the new PAASCU Accreditation Instrument which bears eight areas, that of 1) Leadership and Governance 2) Resource Management 3) Quality Assurance 4) Teaching and Learning 5) Student Services 6) Research 7) External Relations and Linkages 8) Results. As a whole, the meeting proved to be fruitful and the results hopeful.

That in all things God may be glorified!



Administrators Attend CEAP NATIONAL CONVENTION

By: Sr. Celine Saplala, OSB

“Pilgrims of Hope: Exploring Pathways of Synodality” was the theme of the 2023 Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) National Convention held last October 17-20, 2023 at the Waterfront Hotel in Lahug, Cebu. Among the more than 3,500 Catholic educator-delegates were our own Sisters and their lay administrators. Even in the midst of the thousands of educators our sister administrators, Sr. Vicenta Anuran, OSB, Sr. Edna Quiambao, OSB, Christine Pinto, OSB, Sr. Daniela Romero, OSB, Sr. Carmelita Lazaro, OSB, Sr. Jessica Arante, OSB and Sr. Celine Saplala, OSB could still manage to see and exchange updates from our respective schools.

According to Sr. Maria Marissa R. Viri, RVM, the theme of this convention, *“Exploring Pathways of Synodality,”* is especially relevant to our current times. Synodality calls us to embrace a collaborative and inclusive approach to decision-making, where all stakeholders participate actively and contribute their unique perspectives. Through this synodal process”, she said, “we can create a truly transformative educational environment that empowers our students, teachers, and staff to become active contributors to society and agents of positive change”.

It was but proper that Cebu, being the host diocese, to have for its main presider, the Most Rev. Jose S. Palma, D.D., Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Cebu in the Opening Eucharistic Celebration. He is a member of the Dicastery for Culture and Education. While in the last day’s Closing Eucharistic Celebration, its main presider was none other than the Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, Most Rev. Charles Brown, D.D. At the dismissal, he held the image of Sto. Niño, blessing the convention delegates, swaying to the movements and cries of *“Pit, Señor!”*

No CEAP National Convention will be conducted without the conferment of highest awards to outstanding Catholic educators. Foremost is the *Catholic School Heroes Award* with the recipient, **Dr. Ma. Iris A. Melliza**, former President of Holy Cross of Davao College, Inc. A stalwart in education, she headed for many years the Davao Association of Catholic Schools (DACS-CEAP XI. The other highest award is the *Pro Deo et Patria Award*. This year’s awardee is **Fr. Bienvenido F. Nebres, SJ**, former President of Ateneo de Manila University and Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan. He was also former Provincial Superior of the Jesuits in the Philippines.

A unique feature of this year’s convention was the incorporation of the synodal consultations. As we delved into the various discussions and explorations of pathways coming from the results of the sectoral consultations from the regional assemblies, these reminded us, using the words of Sr. Marissa, RVM, *“of our ultimate mission as Catholic educators – to form our students in faith and to guide them toward a personal encounter with Christ. Our role extends beyond the transfer of knowledge; we are entrusted with nurturing our students’ spiritual growth, helping them develop a deep relationship with God and a sense of purpose in their lives”*.

With the blessings of the Santo Niño, whose image was present on stage together with Our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, the convention ended with the fervent prayer that they guide us to become authentic witnesses of God’s love and mercy in the field of Catholic education.



Sr. Vicenta, Sr. Christine and Sr. Celine with some lay administrators from SSC Manila, SSA Tabunok and SAA Legazpi

OSB Tutzing Formandees' Online Encounter: A Synodal Journey

By: Postulant Joni Gail Morales

Reflecting on the success of last year's Tutzing formandees' online meet-up, both formandees and formators express enthusiasm for another meaningful encounter in the coming year. Led by Sr. Mary Paul Baul, OSB, the group of International Formators convened online on October 10 and October 30, 2023, to deliberate on the potential for an enriched experience for formandees at all levels.

While last year's online meetings were exploratory, this year's planning took a more intentional approach. Acknowledging the positive impact of two previous meetings, formators deemed it insufficient, and so unanimously decided to conduct five more weekly sessions, every Tuesday at 7 pm, Manila time, beginning on November 7, 2023. This shift aimed to foster a more consistent and sustained connection among MBST formandees worldwide.

In response to contemplative prayer and a discernment of the signs of the times, formators settled on the theme "A Synodal Journey as Missionary Benedictine Pilgrims of Hope" for this year's encounters. Synodality, which centers the conversation around the Charism and Benedictine Hallmarks, became the guiding principle for the online discussions.

To facilitate meaningful engagement, a weekly discussion guide was shared with each formandee in advance. This provided them with the opportunity for personal reflection and ensured active participation during the online sessions. The aim was to create a dynamic space where formandees could share their thoughts and experiences in alignment with the weekly themes.

The Manila Priory formandees, again chosen to host this year's encounter, took on the responsibility of facilitating the discussions. The online sessions reached their culmination on December 5, 2023, with the formandees presenting a depiction of their journeys. The presentation is scheduled for January 15, 2024, on the feast day of St. Maur and St. Placid.



Tuluyan ni San Benito Celebrates 15 Years of Service

By: Gino Lisondra

December 8, 2023 marked the 15th year anniversary celebration of the Tuluyan ni San Benito in Malate, Manila. Tuluyan first opened its doors to homeless and street families in December 2008, and has since provided assistance and opportunities for these individuals, our fellow brothers and sisters, to improve their quality of life.

Gathered for the celebration and Christmas party were street families composed of over 60 individuals—women, men, children, and infants—joined by the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing in Manila, the Tuluyan staff, Tuluyan scholars, and other invited guests and supporters of Tuluyan and its programs. The event started at around 10:30 in the morning, with a liturgy and opening remarks by S. Theodora Bilocura, OSB, Tuluyan ni San Benito Coordinator. Sr. Theodora's message emphasized the importance of the date in which the celebration was held on December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sr. Theodora also shared with the street families and guests the meaning of the season of Advent.

Some of the Tuluyan scholars also prepared a violin recital, playing familiar Christmas tunes. Lunch was served and was partaken by all—the street families, sisters, staff, Tuluyan scholars and invited guests. The street families played Christmas games facilitated by the Tuluyan staff, with prizes awarded to individual and group winners. Mother Mary Thomas Prado, OSB, Prioress of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing - St Scholastica's Priory, Manila, also gave a message of hope and the relevance of the Advent and Christmas celebrations to the street families.



Some of the homeless individuals also shared their thoughts on how Tuluyan has helped them and their families and friends, and wished and prayed that Tuluyan's outreach services be strengthened and expanded in the future. A skit presentation and a song number by select members of the street families followed.

After this, the Christmas games resumed, followed by a raffle draw with winners receiving gifts and prizes. All of the 60+ street and homeless individuals received prizes. Each street family was also given a Christmas gift bag at the end of the event.

That in all things God may be glorified!



Consunji Family Donates Land to Manila Priory

By: Sr. Constance Tecson, OSB

On a sunny and beautiful morning of the 10th of October, 2023, M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB together with Sr. Rosalina Fajardo, OSB and Sr. Constance Tecson, OSB visited the main office of DMCI in Makati to have the formal signing of the Deed of Donation of the portion of the property owned by South Davao Corp. (SODACO), an agricultural wing of DMCI holdings. They donated 2,000 square meters for the convent area located in San Isidro, Davao Oriental, a 45- minute drive from our Mati convent. Aside from the Deed of Donation, a Memorandum of Agreement was also signed allowing the sisters to have a free use of a 2.5 – hectare land for a model farm for the training of farmers.

DMCI (David M. Consunji, Inc) is owned by the family of the first cousin of our late Sister Dorothy Consunji, OSB. David's daughter, Lucy A. Consunji is the CEO of SODACO agricultural corporation. We thank the Consunji family for their generous donations. We hope and pray that more collaborations for this new venture will improve and enrich the impoverished lives of farmers in the area.



PDRC Relief Operation in Northern Samar

By: Bernaliza Lablabong

As soon as news reached the Priory of the massive flooding in different parts of Northern and Eastern Samar due to persistent, heavy rains on November 21, 2023, immediate action was done. The Priory Disaster Response Committee (PDRC) held meetings and consultations to plan a response to the needs of the affected communities, families, and individuals. A call for donation was organized and posted on social media for the relief operations in Samar. The Sisters assigned in Pambujan sent updates and information on the situation. Bernaliza Lablabong (SPA staff), Jek Bareño (Tuluyan staff), Aldin, & Jerry (Manila Priory drivers) were sent to Pambujan to deliver the relief goods and assist in the relief operations.



Eleven of the 24 towns in the province of Northern Samar had been affected by the massive flooding due to heavy downpour; these were Mondragon, Lapinig, San Roque, Bobon, Catubig, Laoang, Las Navas, Catarman, Lope de Vega, Palapag, and Pambujan (where the mission hospital is located).

The first wave of relief operations led by Sr. Andrea Ecito, OSB, (Superior) & Sr. Angela Bingan, OSB, was conducted on November 25 in Brgy. Kabarian, Pambujan, with 176 families receiving relief packs. The second wave of relief operations was done on December 1, 2023 in Brgy. Ynaguingayan, Pambujan. Ynaguingayan was one of the more badly hit communities, with 1 fatality. The team, composed of Sr. Andrea, OSB, Sr. Noella Montiel, OSB, and Sr. Josie (Franciscan Sister), Berna, and Jek experienced a challenging time in trying to reach the community and transport the goods, since the way to the Barangay was very muddy and slippery, and it was still raining. Thanks to the help of some locals and the army, the group was still able to transport the goods in *bancas* and finally reached Brgy. Ynaguingayan safely. A total of 232 households were able to receive relief packs. The community is usually at high risk during extreme and inclement weather conditions because the river flows in and borders the Barangay on both sides. The Barangay's community is getting smaller, while the river is slowly but constantly expanding. The relief group saw that there is indeed a need for the community to be relocated elsewhere that is safe, because their current location is already in the danger zone.

The next day, December 2, 2023 in the morning, together with people from the Divine Word Hospital led by Sr. Celeste Licas, OSB, the group reached the town of Catubig, in coordination with Msgr. Walter Cerbito, DC of St. Joseph the Worker Parish. They were able to hand out 500 packs of relief goods (distributed to Brgy. Sagudsuron 70 households & Brgy. Guibangan- 70 households, and the rest c/o the Parish to be distributed to other barangays). In the afternoon, 778 packs were distributed to Brgy. Cababtuan, Pambujan. The group appreciated the good attitude of the people in the community; they were grateful, and if their names were not on the list, they did not insist and make a scene. Amidst the difficulty and hardships they encountered during the massive flooding, they remained hopeful and thankful, and are slowly rebuilding and moving on with their lives. A second batch of relief operations to Catubig c/o Fr. Walter Cerbito with relief packs, goods, and essentials were delivered on December 4, 2023 (102 water jugs and 100 packs of goods, clothing, and laundry bars). Clothes were donated to Brgy. Cajumadal, Pambujan (176 families) and Brgy. La Perla, Rawis (375 families) on December 8, 2023, during the Solemnity of the Immaculate Concepcion. A total of 2,331 families/households, 3 municipalities, and 7 barangays were reached by the relief operations.



We thank all the donors who gave cash and in kind; we also thank all the volunteer sisters, SPA staff and Manila Priory drivers, the Pambujan hospital staff, women, Philberth scholars, and local volunteers who helped in the packing, transporting, and distribution of the relief packs and goods. The relief operation was a success because of everyone's effort and help. *That in all things God may be glorified.*



Candle Lighting: “Save Our Sunset, Save Manila Bay”

By: Sr. Rosalina Fajardo, OSB

Some Sisters of the Priory House community, together with our lay partners, trooped to Rajah Sulayman Park in Malate, Manila in the afternoon of October 18, 2023. They joined various anti-reclamation advocates representing a wide sector of Philippine society for a protest rally on Roxas Boulevard along Manila Bay.

The afternoon protest event was organized in collaboration with various faith-based and civil society groups to amplify this resounding call coming from diverse sectors, especially those from the affected communities, to put an end to the destructive reclamation projects in Manila Bay, and begin its rehabilitation. To date, around 22 reclamation projects endanger the coastal area facing Manila Bay and most of all its famous beautiful sunset spanning the Metropolis.

After the assembly and talks at the Rajah Sulayman Park, everyone walked towards the Manila Baywalk carrying their banners and posters, lighting candles up, in a long human chain against the picturesque Manila Bay sunset. Thousands of men, women, youth, students, clergy, religious Brothers and Sisters formed a formidable human chain along the sidewalks of Roxas Blvd. stretching from the US Embassy, Cultural Center of the Philippines and beyond. We hope and pray that this move enlightens hearts to love God’s creation and care for Mother Earth.



Benedictine Educators gather at Rio de Janeiro

By: Sr. Mary Ignatius Aquino, OSB

The International Commission of Benedictine Education (ICBE) organized BENET, the World Conference of Benedictine Educators, with the 2023 Rio edition being the 9th, delayed due to the pandemic. BENET brings together Benedictine leaders worldwide for personal and professional growth, collaboration, and shared learning.

BENET (Benedictine Education Network) Rio 2023, had one hundred sixty six (166) participants from Angola, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Germany, India, Kenya, Philippines (Sr. Rosario Obiniana, OSB; Sr. Mary Ignatius Aquino, OSB and Sr. Maureen Cariaga, OSB), South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom and United States of America on October 11—15, 2023 at the School of Sao Bento, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The theme was: *“What we have received, we pass on to you: Our past and future in the now of Benedictine Education.”* Highlights included a rooftop dinner with a Brazilian band, an Opening Solemn Mass, and a keynote address by Dom Fernando Rivas. Young panelists from different countries shared their experiences in Benedictine schools, challenging educators to enhance their mission.

Participants engaged in meaningful discussions within deaneries, led by Deans who played a vital role in facilitating the conference. Lectio Divina sessions in four languages aimed to create a positive environment for personal encounters with Jesus Christ. Twenty-two workshops, including one on Benedictine Education presented by Sr. Mary Ignatius, OSB, were conducted, emphasizing the importance of the Rule of St. Benedict.

Outings included Sugar Loaf Tour, Olympic Boulevard, Museum of Tomorrow, Historical Center, and Boat Tour – Laurindo Pitta. BENET concluded with Regional Meetings, and the next meeting is scheduled for Melk, Austria in 2026.



Sugar Loaf Group



Lectio Divina Group: English, Spanish, Portuguese



Participants: MBS of Tutzing from Brazil, Philippines, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania



Workshop Group: German, Brazilian, American, Australian, Filipina, Chilean, Indian, South African, Tanzanian

NEWS FROM STATIONS

PRIORY HOUSE

PH Community Translates Love into Concrete Action

By: Sr. Isabel Orito, OSB

“Words are mere bubbles of water while deeds are drops of gold.” This saying is from an unknown author and most people would agree with him/her. Thus, on December 22 and 23, 2023, the Priory House community went out on a mission to verify the truth of this maxim.



The scheduled dates were preceded by an inspiring collaborative activity of packing the things to be distributed, so even if on the day itself you could not go for lack of space in the car or a limit in the number of persons allowed entry, you felt good for you had already given your own contribution. One group, led by Statio Group 2, brought 220 hygiene kits containing a long bar of laundry soap, bath soap, toothbrush with the handle shortened, sachets of shampoo and toothpaste, a pack of sanitary napkins and a small towel to the women inmates of Pasay City

Jail. Beforehand, the warden told Sr. Theodora Bilocura, OSB, that for security reasons, only two will be allowed entry, but on the day itself, to the surprise of all, they were permitted to enter the place where 30 inmates were already waiting. When Sr. Mary Emmanuel Espera, OSB read the prayer in Filipino, expressing our desire to imitate God’s way of unconditional loving so that Christmas can happen anytime, anywhere even inside the prison walls, tears welled up in their eyes. That gave an impact to the sisters. The remaining kits would be distributed to the rest of the inmates by the warden who expressed the wish that if possible, the sisters’ visit will happen every Christmas.

The next day, Statio group 3 and volunteers left at around 11: 15 am. One car with 100 packs of big plastic cups of cooked rice, chicken adobo, bottled water and canned sardines went along Osmena Highway while the other car loaded with 200 packs went to Del Pan and Tondo, Manila. The Sisters’ eyes were on the watch to spot the street dwellers and to tell the driver to stop at once. They even called them out of their nap and then out of the windows and doors of the car came outstretched hands bearing the prepared food. The sight of those faces expressing delight and gratitude was food for our own soul. They shouted to their fellow street dwellers: “Biyaya! Biyaya!” which means “Blessings” in English. What gave us fright though, was the possibility of being run over by buses and cars when they crossed from the other side of the street, but they seemed to master the maneuver. The sponsors of two Simbang Gabi masses and the combined mass collections made all these possible. That in all things God may be glorified!

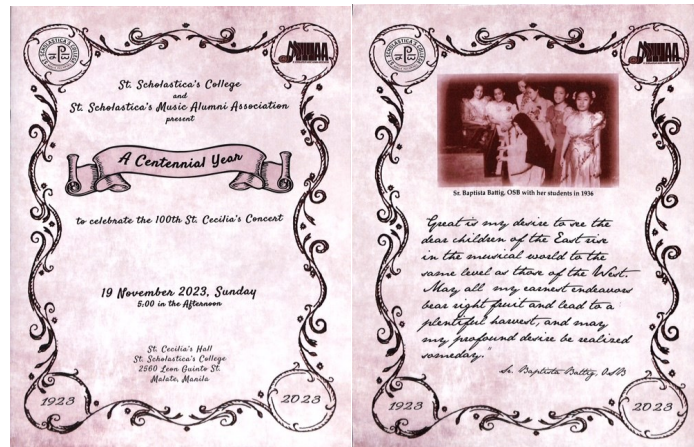


The 100th St. Cecilia Concert- A Centennial Legacy

By: Sister Therese C. Bulatao, OSB

Sr. Baptista Battig wrote in her journal: "Great is my desire to see the dear children of the East rise in the musical world to the same level as those of the West. May all my earnest endeavor bear right fruit and lead to a plentiful harvest, and my profound desire be realized someday."

On November 19, 2023 the resounding accolade on all the performances of the 100th St. Cecilia Concert, proved true the realization of Sr. Baptista Battig's profound desire....her earnest endeavor had borne right fruits and plentiful harvests through a century.



A walk down memory lane led to the first St. Cecilia Concert in 1923, which Sr. Baptista organized as something "new" at that time. She seriously saw to it that the concert would be presented yearly. And so it was, until World War II saw the destruction of the St. Cecilia's Hall. The concerts were then held in the Social Hall. She organized St. Cecilia's Club for the purpose of training music students in public performance through the annual and the individual junior and graduation recitals.

On December 8, 1941 the musical grandeur in the academe and performances were discontinued in St. Scholastica's College at the outbreak of World War II. A year after in 1942, however, the Music Department was reopened under the leadership of Sr. Regintrudis Mayer, OSB. The Filipino Youth Symphony Orchestra was founded. Male students were accepted since there was no other music school open for them then. The orchestra's performances were under the baton of Professor Luis Valencia.

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, the ruins of St. Cecilia's Hall rose to newness upon its rebuilding and reopening in 1955. Sr. Gunfrida Schneyer, OSB, the last German Dean of the School of Music introduced again something "new" – the premier of a new musical work at every concert. These are performed and showcased by faculty members who were sent to FONTAINBLEAU School in France for further studies. From then on St. Cecilia's Concert was a Gala affair.

St. Cecilia's Hall has been the serving stage for both budding artists in music, poetry, dance and drama and virtuosos, composers, scholars and other artists of distinction. With resounding and reverberating hundred voices and fingers echoing through and within the walls of the cultural landmark, that is St. Cecilia's Hall, ten decades have unfurled a musical heritage and tradition which is stamped with dedication, recognition, and excellent performances that brought fame and purpose, crowning Sr. Baptista Battig's profound desire and dream that "the Children of the East rise in the musical world to the same level as those of the West."

After the concert, dinner was served at the Kunibert Hall where the Missionary Benedictine Sisters shared the fellowship and joy of celebrating the legacy and memory of Sr. Baptista Battig, OSB with a mix of friends, benefactors, faculty members, alumnae, concert performers and other invited guests.

Note: Much of the texts of this write-up are paraphrased and sourced from the messages of Sr. Agnella Capili, Dean of the School of Music and Ms. Nelia Mitra, President of the St. Scholastica Music Alumni Association as these appeared in the 100th St. Cecilia Concert Program.



2023 Last Quarter @ SSCS

By: M Irene Dabalus, OSB

Despite the rumblings of Taal Lake volcano this October, the alert level remained at 1 and emissions were blown away from Tagaytay. “Air is clean!” said the yellow butterflies flitting among the flowers.

A look at our guest list in this last quarter showed a dramatic uptick of high school groups on retreat. This is in contrast to the thin sowing in the first half of the year. Topping the list were the Grade 10 (3 batches) and Grade 12 (3 batches) students from St. Scholastica's College- Manila for 2 days each of recollection. St. Scholastica's Academy-Marikina followed suit in two groups for their two – day retreat. Not the least were the 95 Assumptionists of the University of the Assumption, coming all the way from Pampanga.

The different student groups exuded a prayerful hush as the young people attended to their sessions. At times some groups were heard diving into lively discussions, but most of the time the discipline of quiet activity was palpable.

Two pilgrimage groups from San Beda Alabang came to visit and pray at the cave of St. Benedict and hear about his eremitical life in Subiaco. They had lunch only for the day.

There was also a strong presence of the Marriage Encounter of 110 persons from the Immaculate Conception Parish who already booked rooms in advance for the year 2024. A number of parish groups – Antipolo, Baclaran, Bacoor, and Molino – also made their appearance.

Meanwhile, needed repairs of the “ancient buildings” demanded attention at every turn – water tower, Building E gutters, chapel roofings, electric fans in every room, and St. Benedict Resource Center equipment. These never “pass away”.

Thus, this 4th quarter was blessed for SSCS in every way – both in missionary vigor and in an economic plus.



Retreat - St. Anthony Academy Grade 10



SSC-Manila Grade 12

NOURISHING BODY AND SOUL: LAUNCHING OF FEEDING AND CATECHISM PROGRAM

By: Sr. Angela Bingan, OSB

Last August 2023, the Sister-in-charge of the Philberth scholars of CBS Pambujan N. Samar requested the scholars to conduct a survey within the vicinity of the hospital regarding the nutrition and spiritual values of the children. After the survey, the scholars discovered that there are children ages 6 to 13 years old who still cannot execute the proper way of doing the sign of the cross and are incapable of reciting the basic prayers. To address this problem, Sr. Angela Bingan, OSB, discussed it with the Scholars and presented to them her plan to start a catechism class and feeding program for the children and challenging them to actively participate in the program.

The scholars accepted the challenge and committed themselves to the program. So last September 23, 2023, 25 children from Barangay Cababto-an gathered to launch the catechism and feeding programs which will be held twice a month on a Saturday at 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon. After a short catechesis, the children are then given nutritious snacks.

Under the supervision of the Sister-in-charge of the Philberth Scholars, they showed sincere commitment in doing their tasks of giving catechesis and preparing food for the children. Hence, the scholars are determined to never get tired of encouraging the parents and their children to participate in these programs.



FORMATION HOUSE UPDATES

RITE OF ADMISSION TO ASPIRANCY

By: Novice Ma. Carmela Malinao

For Imy Villanueva from Bago City, October 30, 2023 was the long - awaited day of her entrance at the Formation House. M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB, accompanied by the vocation directress, Sr. Marialuz Dungca, OSB and Sr. Mary Samuelle Formoso, OSB brought her there for the Rite of Admission to Aspirancy. Two other cars arrived with the family of Imy to witness her entrance into the Pre-Novitiate.



At a quarter to 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon, the Rite of Admission started. The Opening Hymn entitled "You are Mine," was followed by welcoming words from the Formation House community superior, Sr. Mary Vincent Feliciano, OSB. The scripture passage from the book of the prophet Jeremiah 1:4-5 was read by the Pre-Novitiate Directress, Sr. Mary Paul Baul, OSB. Sr. Marialuz Dungca, OSB, presented Imy to M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB, who asked the candidate about her resolve to seek God and His Church. The candidate responded that she wanted to seek God by entering the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. Imy was formally admitted to the Aspirancy and was given a holy Bible as a sign of acceptance. M. Mary Thomas presented the new aspirant to Sr. Mary Paul, and both gave her a welcoming kiss of peace. After the concluding prayer, the assembly sang "Jerusalem My Destiny."

Greetings and well wishes were given outside the chapel and Imy bade goodbye to her father and other relatives.

May the good Lord who called her to this vocation sustain her resolve in answering His call through the Benedictine way of life. That in all things God may be glorified!



Advent- a time of giving!

By: Postulant Joanne Zamudio

Advent Season is a very special time of the year that sometimes gets overshadowed by the bright lights and festivities of the Christmas season it precedes. The Advent Season is all about reflecting on how one can prepare the heart and the home for Christ's birth in the world as it is today. It is a time when faith communities and families remember, through prayer, reflections, fasting, and charitable works what the true meaning of Jesus' birth is.

For us here in the Formation House, we are grateful to the Lord for the opportunity given us to reach out to our brothers and sisters who are deprived of liberty in the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), Tagaytay City. This activity was made possible because of the generous people who contributed their love and goods for our charity project.

The planning and preparations were done by the pre-novitiate community led by Sr. Mary Paul, OSB. It started with a visit to the BJMP on the 2nd week of November in order to get pertinent information and to survey what is needed by the detainees at this time. The schedule was set on December 6, 2023 in the morning. We prepared a simple program and distribution of a special lugaw and hygiene kits. The hygiene kit contained a bathroom towel, sulphur soap, toothpaste and laundry bar.

On the day of the program, we, from the Formation House community, headed by our superior, Sr. Mary Vincent, OSB shared our joy and love to the 13 dorm coordinators. We are grateful for the BJMP warden and all his personnel who warmly accommodated us and made a way to arrange the time and schedule for our visit. What made the visit feel more special, with the atmosphere of solidarity, was the segregation of the items per dorm because all helped in counting and packing. As we distributed the goods, we saw on the faces of our brothers and sisters the smiles of excitement and joy. They were also vocal in expressing their gratitude to God as one mentioned, "Salamat po dahil kahit andito kami sa loob, naalaala nyo kami."

We all have a duty, an obligation, to be charitable to our neighbor. We proclaim in word that we are disciples of the Light and it is God who provides us the chance to encounter Him in the people we meet, especially the poor, the deprived, and the abandoned. As the letter of St. James reminds us "Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him?"

May we all in this season of Advent be open to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit and be more charitable not only in words but most especially in our actions. That in all things God may be glorified!



JUNIORATE UPDATES

Juniors Join IFRS Integration Day

By: Sr. Sophia Marie De Guzman, OSB

On November 18, 2023, Sr. Amanda Marie Fondevilla, OSB and Sr. Sophia Marie De Guzman, OSB had their Integration Day at the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies (IFRS). This activity is held every year to serve as a venue for the IFRS students to showcase and perform what they have learned from their respective classes throughout the semester. The theme was "IFRS Formation: Molding us into Being." The students were in their national costumes; and they set up an exhibit displaying the rich and colorful cultures of their corresponding countries.



The program started with a Holy Mass with a beautiful interpretative dance procession. Then, the new IFRS president, Sr. Odysa Estor, OSA delivered her welcome remarks. It was then followed by the presentations of the students from the five chosen subjects which would reflect the core fields of the IFRS education namely General Education, Women and Gender, Scriptures, and Theology. The subjects were Art Appreciation, Craft of Research and Writings, Women in the History of Christianity, Psalms and Wisdom Literature, and Christology. The performances varied from drama to song to interpretative dance. Afterwards, it was then followed by an inspirational message from the IFRS Dean Miguel Lambino. The program continued with the presentations of the four clusters namely BCMST (Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand), Vietnamese, Filipino, and MISPAT (Malaysia, Indonesia, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Pacific Island, and Timor Leste). The different clusters performed their distinct cultural dances. The IFRS Personnel also rendered a very touching presentation depicting the current global issues we are facing today. Finally, the program ended with the closing remarks by Sr. Amanda Marie, OSB, the Student Coordinating Team Secretary. Shared lunch followed afterwards.



BENEDICTINE OBLATES UPDATES

Benedictine Oblates attend Recollection

By: Sr. M. Hilda Buhay, OSB

Last December 09, 2023, Sister Carmelita Lazaro, OSB, the Oblates' moderator of St. Scholastica's Academy, Marikina (SSAM), organized an Advent Recollection held in St. Brigitta Conference Room. Sister Hilda Buhay, OSB, facilitated the Advent Recollection with the theme: "*Christmas Longing of Oblates*".

Reflections focused on the daily Christmas longing "to prefer nothing to the love of Christ" (RB 72:11). The constant exercise of this Benedictine option "to seek God" (RB 4:21) jars against today's cultural shift when materialism is idolized, faith is secularized, witness is minimized and technology is idolized.

The morning conference culminated in the Oblation Renewal of some Oblates, which was integrated during the Midday Prayer in the presence of Sister Edna Quiambao, OSB, who heads the community of SSAM and the St. Benedict's Home (SBH) Oblates.

In the afternoon, the SBH resident and online Oblates (*Kapuso ni San Benito*) who also attended the morning conference, continued their Advent Recollection as they joined the SBH community in their Adoration Hour and Vespers Time.

The next morning of December 10, the SBH online Oblates met with Sr. Hilda after breakfast to share Recollection reflections before leaving.



SSAM + SBH Oblates with Sr. Carmelita Lazaro, OSB and Sr. Hilda Buhay, OSB



Resident and On-line Oblates of St. Benedict's

VOCATION

Recollection with Seminarians in Bataan

By: Sr. Marialuz Dungca, OSB

Rev. Fr. Joseph “Jay” Quicho of the Santisima Trinidad Parish, Malate, Manila invited one of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing of the Manila Priory to facilitate a recollection for their seminarians at Virgen Milagrosa del Rosario College Seminary (VMdRCS) in Balanga, Bataan. Sr. Marialuz Dungca, OSB facilitated the recollection on November 10-11, 2023 and had sessions with 15 seminarians and a brother to the path of the diaconate. The VMdRCS is located within a compound at the back of the Bahay Puso Apostolate Foundation Inc., a home for the aged institution run by the St. Paul the Chartes sisters but under the Diocese of Balanga, Bataan. The place is surrounded by trees that envelop the ground in tranquility and peacefulness.



The session started on the evening of Friday and closed with a mass at noon of Saturday. The seminarians’ open hearts and active participation allowed the Holy Spirit to work within them. They embraced vulnerability, honesty about their feelings and insights, and receptiveness to the love that God continuously bestowed upon them. In addition, they were able to express their gratitude to the people who have been instrumental in their formation journey. As a post-recollection session, Sr. Marialuz, OSB took time and offered counselling and spiritual direction to some seminarians seeking guidance. The permission for such an encounter spoke volumes about the commitment of their formators to their deep care for the seminarians’ welfare.

In conclusion, the “I Am Loved” Recollection was a gathering of a collective affirmation of love, faith and divine journey. It was a re-experiencing of the affectionate, compassionate God, who never runs out of mercy and love. The warmth of connection, the depth of self-reflection and the prospect of new vocation to the priestly life painted a beautiful tapestry of hope and love. As each seminarian moves forward in his formation years, he carries with him the assurance that indeed “he is capable of loving for he is constantly loved” by God, who is LOVE.

After the recollection, S. Marialuz, OSB had the chance to converse over lunch with two ladies, Ms. Mary Rose Castillo (SSC 2011 alumna) and Ms. Rhea Diaz (former registrar of the seminary), young professionals who can be potential vocation prospects.



Truly the hospitality and generosity of the community headed by Rev. Fr. Rosauro Guila, Rector of the Seminary, Fr. Joseph Quicho, Director for Spiritual Formation, Fr. Jason Balan, director of the Propaedeutic Department was greatly felt and appreciated. It was indeed an opportunity for dialogue and communication of Christ’s mission within the bounds of personal and communal growth.

VOCATION ANIMATION UPDATE

by Sr. Marialuz Dungca, OSB

"THE LDS IS GOD'S WAY TO REALIGN MY HEART'S DISPOSITION TO WHAT TRULY MATTERS IN LIFE."

The Vocation Animators of the different communities of the Manila Priory had their simultaneous Vocation Activities in their own respective communities. They had been working hard and exhausting all possible ways to look for prospects among young women who are interested in our way of life.

FOR INSTANCE, IN MARIHATAG COMMUNITY,

Sr. Hildegard Amboy, OSB and co-animators had a Vocation Talk in Bayabas Parish to Grade School and High School students on August 12, 2023. There was also a chance to talk and interview some young professionals individually. Within the month of October, there was the giving away of Vocation posters to students at the University of Vigan City and casual/friendly talk with High school students at the Santo Niño Parish during this Rosary month. While on November 3, 2023, the sisters had Life Direction Session with 4 college students at the convent.



THE THREE STATIO GROUPS OF THE PRIORY HOUSE COMMUNITY HAD THEIR OWN SEPARATE LIFE DIRECTION SESSIONS IN DIFFERENT VENUES WITH VARIED PARTICIPANTS.

Group 1 headed by Sr. Rosalina Fajardo, OSB had theirs last November 24 with the employees of the Bank of the Philippine Island (BPI) Wealth Branch in Makati.

Then it was followed by Group 2, headed by Sr. Isabel Orito, OSB last November 25 at the St. Scholastica BeneFarm in San Fernando, Pampanga, attended by 7 young ladies, members of Lingkod ng Panginoon, who were discerning on what path to take in life.

Group 3 had 2 separate sessions: the first one was held at Friedenshaus facilitated by Sr. Pia Lansang, OSB and attended by 11 ladies and the other one in BeneFarm Tanauan, Batangas, hosted by Sr. Juana Maria, facilitated by Sr. Isabel, OSB, and attended by 32 girls and ladies who live within the vicinity.



Last December 2, Sr. Carmelita Lazaro, OSB, S. Evangeline Madayag, OSB, Sr. Nicole Garcia, OSB of the Marikina community and co-animators participated in the Vocation Jamboree held at St. Paul Seminary, Antipolo City. It was attended by the youth of the diocese, around 300 individuals, from different parishes. And from Mati community, Sr. Claudia Sampal, OSB had boarding house visitation of the Philbert Scholars, located across the DORSU (Davao Oriental State University) for vocation promotion last December 4. There were 7 ladies and 4 men (college students and some were student leaders) who attended the said activity. As part of synodality, their struggles were also listened to during the sessions.

INTER PRIORY SHARING



Sr. Maria Gabrielle Costrumbrado, OSB flew to Rome on December 21, 2023. She will assist in the secretarial work of the Generalate for one year.



Sr. Mary Grace Macatuno, OSB left for Seoul, South Korea to work with Filipino migrant workers and teach Korean Children in Kindergarten. She is the first Filipina missionary in Seoul Priory.



CONGRATULATIONS TO SR. MA. EZECHIEL FERNANDEZ, OSB & ST. SCHOLASTICA'S ACADEMY, BACOLOD GRADE SCHOOL UNIT

for having been re-accredited for 5 years by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, College and Universities (PAASCU) last November.

CONGRATULATIONS TO SR. CELINE SAPLALA, OSB & ST. AGNES ACADEMY, LEGAZPI

The Agnesian School Publication has been awarded as the BEST STUDENT ORGAN (High School category) by the Catholic Mass Media Awards (CMMA) last October 28, 2023.

PAASCU RE-ACCREDITS HFA

By Sr. Mary Frances Dizon, OSB

Holy Family Academy (HFA) of Angeles, Pampanga, Inc. had its PAASCU Accreditations in two successive weeks: October 19-20 for the Junior High School and October 25-26 for the Grade School.

The new PAASCU Accreditation instrument was used for the first time. It pays to work hard and pray hard at the same time. Preliminary feedbacks for both Grade School and High School are good and the recommendations are doable. That in all things God may be glorified!

MANILA PRIORY BULLETIN TEAM

EDITORIAL TEAM:

SR. ROSALINA FAJARDO, OSB, SR. ISABEL ORITO, OSB,
SR. MARY PETER MACKAY, OSB & SR. IMELDA HALILI, OSB

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 1) Original image of the Philippine flag used for the Nameplate / Masthead: https://www.pngitem.com/middle/10RJTJi_high-resolution-philippine-flag-printable-hd-png-download/ 2) Title Font: Morris Roman - Downloaded free from <https://www.dafont.com/morris-roman.font>